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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP (JSAWYER), NEA/PPD (ASOMERSET, DBENZE),
NEA/PI, R

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SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: KUWAIT MEDIA REACTION: PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS -- PLUS FOUR WOMEN, MINUS FOUR ISLAMISTS

REF: KUWAIT 490

SUMMARY

¶1. Summary and Comment. Initial results of Kuwait's May 16 parliamentary elections were announced in the early hours of Sunday, May 17. Due to the timing, Kuwait's print media on May 17 contained limited to no reporting on the vote tallies. Local dailies, however, distributed the latest news via their websites. Blogs and online magazines also posted news and analysis on the election results. Headlines focused on the historic win for the four Kuwaiti women who garnered enough votes to enter the National Assembly. Several media outlets commented on the Islamist bloc's loss of four seats, two from Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) and two from Salafi bloc. The media also highlighted the success of Shiite candidates. End Summary and Comment.

Media Headlines: Women Take Center Stage

¶2. Conservative, liberal, and pro-government print media and online magazines carried major headlines on one common theme: the victory of Kuwaiti women in the elections.

-- "Change on Women's Day" (conservative Arabic daily Al-Watan)

-- "Change...!" (liberal Arabic daily Al-Rai)

-- "A step forward - Women in the National assembly on the third attempt" (Pro-government Arabic daily Awan)

-- "Historical Victory: Maasouma, Rola and Aseel to the Parliament and Salwa and Thekra were so close!" (moderate Arabic daily Al-Qabas) [Note: the headline was based on predictions that only three women would win seats. End Note.]

-- "Kuwaiti women made the history!" (moderate and pro-government Arabic daily Al-Anbaa)

In addition to describing the Election Day as "Kuwaiti Women's Day" par excellence, pro-government Al-Anbaa published a Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) article in which HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his pleasure with the advanced results achieved by Kuwaiti women in these elections.

¶3. Several other Arabic dailies, such as liberal Al-Jarida, pro-government Al-Seyassah, and Shiite Conservative Al-Dar, did not report results or even final predictions. Their headlines focused on the peaceful election process and a statement by the former Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammad while visiting the polls on May 16. Shaykh Nasser was widely quoted as saying "the elections are honest and let's work together to bring Kuwait back as the pearl of the Gulf."

Four Trends Emerge in Initial Analysis

¶4. Moderate Arabic daily Al-Qabas ran a small analytical article on the election results. It listed four trends emerging from the election results:

- First, the election of Kuwaiti women to Parliament.
- Second, the return of so-called "escalation members" of Parliament; i.e. MP Mohammad Hayef Al-Mutairi.
- Third, consistency in the number of seats held by some political blocs; i.e. the Democratic Coalition.
- Fourth, gain of seats by Shiite candidates.

Online Magazines and Blogs Weigh in on Results

¶5. (U) On Saturday, May 16, before any announcement of elections results, owner and publisher of the Al-Aan online magazine, Dr. Saad Bin Tiflah Al-Ajmi (former Minister of Information and a liberal political activist), opined: "the major change in the 2009 Parliament in my opinion will be by women entering the Parliament dome for first time in history. This is a step that will change a great deal of social principles, and will be a first step on a long road to allow women to play a bigger role in many areas in Kuwait." (<http://www.alaan.cc/pagedetails.asp?nid=33466&cid=47>) Al-Aan's

KUWAIT 00000500 002 OF 002

online reporting of election results focused on two issues. One, the nine seats won by Shiite candidates, pointing out that this is 18 percent of the total seats in Parliament. Two, the two-seat loss experienced by both ICM and the Salafi bloc. The latter, Al-Aan reported, saw its Parliamentary representation cut in half; from four seats to two.

¶6. Bloggers began their comments on the election results by congratulating female candidates for their victory:

- Exombiesm (liberal, <http://www.exzombiesm.com>) wrote: "Maasouma, Salwa, Rola and Aseel, congratulations for breaking the monopoly. However, it is now time for you to prove that you deserve the seat that you won."
- Ma6goog (liberal, <http://www.ma6goog.com>) congratulated all the women who won and also consoled Thekra Al-Rashidi, who was close to a win in the fourth constituency, a largely tribal area. The blogger blamed the [tribal] primaries for al-Rashidi's failure.
- Al-Tarek (Islamist blogger, member of ICM, <http://www.altariq2009.com>) announced ICM's failure in this election and called for ICM to change to the "right" methodology and ideology. He concluded that those who won were able to do so because the ICM failed in its behavior and strategy.

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